

Message #7  
Lessons from the Kings of Judah

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## JOASH AND A CRUMBLING FOUNDATION 2 CHRONICLES 23-24

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

The Champlain Towers (PROJECTOR ON--- CHAMPLAIN TOWERS) is a set of three luxury condo towers twelve stories high, located just north of Miami Beach near the ocean. The buildings were completed in 1981. The towers offer beautiful views of the Atlantic. (CHAMPLAIN TOWERS SOUTH VIEW) Condo apartments range in size between 1200 and 4500 square feet. (CAMPLAIN TOWERS SOUTH CONDOS) Units like this one sell between \$500,000 and over \$1 million. Rentals average \$4000 a month. Various amenities come along with the living space. The location is difficult to beat.

There was one slight problem with this idyllic setting. On June 24 of this year at 1:25 AM the south tower suddenly collapsed. (CHAPMPLAIN TOWERS SOUTH COLLAPSE) Ninety-eight people were killed. It was the third deadliest structural engineering disaster in US history. The foundation did not hold.

There were troubling signs behind the scenes. There were a series of three different contractors supervising the construction of the buildings. That was unusual. One of the companies had a checkered reputation in the industry. In 2018 an engineering study was done of the building. The experts reported that there was evidence of water leakage and damage to the steel and concrete supports. In April of this year the building was examined again, and engineers found that the foundation had become much worse. They urged immediate action. The condo board approved \$15 million for necessary repairs. Unfortunately those repairs did not come soon enough.

(PROJECTOR OFF) Jesus compared life to a building which needs a solid foundation. We don't need to look very far on TV news or in social media; we don't need to read very much in the newspaper or news magazines to find stories of individuals, businesses, governments, and even churches which collapse because of inadequate foundations. Often it is the storms of life which precipitate a crash. In the case of the Champlain Towers it was simply the weight of unattended maintenance and perhaps earlier structural errors.

In our story today about another king of Judah we discover that the challenges of life do in this leader of God's chosen people. They reveal that he had a weak foundation, though like the Champlain Towers, that was not obviously visible to the naked eye. In his story we hope to find lessons that might have application for us.

We saw last time in our ongoing study of 2 Chronicles that King Jehoshaphat (PROJECTOR ON--- JOASH ANCESTRY), ruling in the southern half of the divided kingdom, married off his son Jehoram to the daughter of evil King Ahab from the

northern kingdom of Israel. Kings and lay people alike were commanded in God's law not to marry those from pagan backgrounds. But Jehoram married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. She was an evil influence. When Athaliah's husband, King Jehoram died, she tried to kill all of the remaining direct descendants in the line of David. At the end of #22 we saw that there was a heroine, a sister of Ahaziah, who saved a young child from Athaliah's murderous campaign. This Jeash was hidden away in God's temple, which was overseen by this sister of Ahaziah's husband Jehoida. The heroine's name was Joshabeath.

I.

We pick up the story in #23 of 2 Chronicles (which is p. 374 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs), as we find that THE FOUNDATION OF THE JOASH ADMINISTRATION IS ESTABLISHED. (I. THE FOUNDATION OF THE...) The year is about 837 BC. Verse 1 tells us: **“But in the seventh year Jehoiada took courage and entered into a covenant with the commanders of hundreds, Azariah the son of Jeroham, Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, Azariah the son of Obed, Maaseiah the son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat the son of Zichri.**

Queen Athaliah has been ruling over Judah for the past six years. She thinks that she has wiped out everyone in the line of David. Meanwhile priest Jehoida and his wife have been raising Joash, the last surviving son of Ahaziah. In the seventh year Jehoida decides that is time to stage a coup. He includes these other government leaders in his plot.

According to vv. 2 & 3, **“And they went about through Judah and gathered the Levites from all the cities of Judah, and the heads of fathers' houses of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem. 3 And all the assembly made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And Jehoiada said to them, ‘Behold, the king's son! Let him reign, as the Lord spoke concerning the sons of David.’”** Jehoida and his fellow coup plotters let the Levites in on the plot. The Levites were the tribe which was given responsibility for serving in the temple in Jerusalem. They had a natural interest in seeing that work continue, especially since Athaliah had introduced Canaanite gods. Meanwhile her approval rating in the country was tanking.

This covenant agreement probably has to do with the leadership arrangement after a successful coup. Joash is still a child. So it appears that Jehoida the priest will function as an advisor to the king with special authority. Part of this agreement involves a recognition that only direct descendants of David have a right to rule over God's people.

Verses 4-7: **“This is the thing that you shall do: of you priests and Levites who come off duty on the Sabbath, one third shall be gatekeepers, 5 and one third shall be at the king's house and one third at the Gate of the Foundation. And all the people shall be in the courts of the house of the Lord. 6 Let no one enter the house of the Lord except the priests and ministering Levites. They may enter, for they are holy, but all the people shall keep the charge of the Lord. 7 The Levites shall surround the king, each with his weapons in his hand. And whoever enters**

**the house shall be put to death. Be with the king when he comes in and when he goes out.”**

According to the Law of Moses only the priests and the Levites were entitled to access to the inner parts of the temple. They all seem to be included in the plot. It is scheduled to happen on a Sabbath day. Normally there was a changing of those on duty in the temple every Sabbath day. So a little extra activity on that day should not arouse undue attention from Queen Athaliah. The Levites are also given responsibility to guard the young king.

Verse 8 tells us: **“The Levites and all Judah did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded, and they each brought his men, who were to go off duty on the Sabbath, with those who were to come on duty on the Sabbath, for Jehoiada the priest did not dismiss the divisions.”** The priests were a subset of the Levites. They had a vested interest in what happened in the temple, since they were being undermined by Athaliah and her Baal worshipers. The coup is scheduled to begin on a Saturday. The shift of priests and Levites scheduled to go off duty actually stay around.

According to vv. 9-11, **“And Jehoiada the priest gave to the captains the spears and the large and small shields that had been King David's, which were in the house of God. 10 And he set all the people as a guard for the king, every man with his weapon in his hand, from the south side of the house to the north side of the house, around the altar and the house. 11 Then they brought out the king's son and put the crown on him and gave him the testimony. And they proclaimed him king, and Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and they said, “Long live the king.”**

Thus the plot is sprung. Young Joash is anointed king of Judah. He is given a copy of the “testimony.” This could be a copy of the agreement made in v. 3. I am more inclined to think that it is the Law of Moses, the basic governing document for the people of Israel. It is fitting that the Levites bring out armor from King David. This has symbolic significance, in that Jehoiada and his coup plotters are seeking to reestablish the prophesied line of David on the throne of Israel.

Verses 12 & 13: **“When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she went into the house of the Lord to the people. 13 And when she looked, there was the king standing by his pillar at the entrance, and the captains and the trumpeters beside the king, and all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets, and the singers with their musical instruments leading in the celebration. And Athaliah tore her clothes and cried, ‘Treason! Treason!’”** This is rich. She accuses the coup plotters of treason when she is the one who has gone against Israel’s agreements with YHWH, the God of Israel, and has sought to establish herself on the throne of David.

Finally the noise in the temple gets her attention. She is probably confused at first. For she is convinced that she has wiped out all the descendants in the line of David. Who is

this child king? It seems clear that she does not have a lot of popular support. Notice also that singers and musicians take a leading role in this celebration.

According to vv. 14 & 15, **“Then Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains who were set over the army, saying to them, ‘Bring her out between the ranks, and anyone who follows her is to be put to death with the sword.’ For the priest said, ‘Do not put her to death in the house of the Lord.’ 15 So they laid hands on her, and she went into the entrance of the horse gate of the king's house, and they put her to death there.”** In the end Athaliah does not seem to have much popular support.

Her downfall reminds me of the Ceausescus, who ruled over Romania in the 1980s. They were so cruel that the army turned on them at the end, and troops seemed to be fighting for the opportunity to participate in the firing squad which killed them one Christmas day.

The place of Athaliah's death is ironic. It is by the Horse gate. Her mother, the evil Queen Jezebel was trampled to death by horses. The illegitimacy of Athaliah's rule is evident in that she does not even merit a summary of her reign. Bad kings of Judah at least got some recognition of their rule.

Verse 16: **“And Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and all the people and the king that they should be the Lord's people.”** We are not told the exact content of this covenant. Probably it is based on God's law handed down to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Certainly there must have been a recognition of the promises of God to David that his descendants would occupy the rightful throne of Israel. The foundation of this new administration appears to be set in the right direction.

According to v. 17, **“Then all the people went to the house of Baal and tore it down; his altars and his images they broke in pieces, and they killed Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars.”** The punishment upon Athaliah and these Baal worshipers may seem harsh, but Moses in Deuteronomy #13 said that God's people are to deal harshly with those who seek to draw the descendants of Abraham away from worship of the true God. The appropriate punishment in Deuteronomy 13 was said to be stoning.

Verses 18-20: **“And Jehoiada posted watchmen for the house of the Lord under the direction of the Levitical priests and the Levites whom David had organized to be in charge of the house of the Lord, to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, as it is written in the Law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, according to the order of David. 19 He stationed the gatekeepers at the gates of the house of the Lord so that no one should enter who was in any way unclean. 20 And he took the captains, the nobles, the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and they brought the king down from the house of the Lord, marching through the upper gate to the king's house. And they set the king on the royal throne.”**

The important part of any successful Jewish royal administration is to get temple worship in order. Such seems to be the effort here. A good foundation is seemingly being laid.

Chapter 23 concludes in v. 21: **“So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet after Athaliah had been put to death with the sword.”** Thus everything appears to be good. The people are happy. There is peace in the land, which is typically evidence in the Chronicles of God’s blessing. A good foundation for the new administration seems to have been laid.

II.

In vv. 1-14 of #24 we find that THE FOUNDATION OF THE JOASH ADMINISTRATION IS EXPANDED. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE FOUNDATION OF THE JOASH...)

Everything seems to be headed in the right direction. According to the first three verses of #24, **“Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba. 2 And Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest. 3 Jehoiada got for him two wives, and he had sons and daughters.”**

Zibiah was one of the wives of Ahaziah. The priest Jehoiada, who is Joash’s uncle, is initially the power behind the throne. He seems intent upon replenishing the house of David by encouraging Joash to have lots of kids when he gets older.

Verses 4 & 5: **“After this Joash decided to restore the house of the Lord. 5 And he gathered the priests and the Levites and said to them, ‘Go out to the cities of Judah and gather from all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that you act quickly.’ But the Levites did not act quickly.”**

As Joash gets a little older, he appears to develop concern for the physical condition of the temple in Jerusalem. He tells the Levites to get involved in collecting money for this task. It is not completely clear why they seem to drag their feet. It could be that they have not been getting any money for their service in the temple. Certainly Athaliah would not have been encouraging money collections for the YHWH temple in Jerusalem. Perhaps the economy was so bad that the Levites recognized that the people of Judah were not happy to pay a religious tax.

Some time goes by, and King Joash gets involved again in this temple improvement project. We read in vv. 6 & 7, **“So the king summoned Jehoiada the chief and said to him, ‘Why have you not required the Levites to bring in from Judah and Jerusalem the tax levied by Moses, the servant of the Lord, and the congregation of Israel for the tent of testimony?’ 7 For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken into the house of God, and had also used all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord for the Baals.”**

So the temple does need repairs because of the neglect and direct damage done by Athaliah. The Old Testament law required that every adult male was to pay a half shekel

toward the upkeep of the tabernacle in the desert and later the Jerusalem temple every year. Probably that had not happened during the reign of Athaliah. Perhaps some kind of deal was now made whereby the Levites and priests would get their rightful share of other sacrifices which were brought to the temple.

This new arrangement seems to work out well in vv. 8-13: **“So the king commanded, and they made a chest and set it outside the gate of the house of the Lord. 9 And proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to bring in for the Lord the tax that Moses the servant of God laid on Israel in the wilderness. 10 And all the princes and all the people rejoiced and brought their tax and dropped it into the chest until they had finished. 11 And whenever the chest was brought to the king's officers by the Levites, when they saw that there was much money in it, the king's secretary and the officer of the chief priest would come and empty the chest and take it and return it to its place. Thus they did day after day, and collected money in abundance. 12 And the king and Jehoiada gave it to those who had charge of the work of the house of the Lord, and they hired masons and carpenters to restore the house of the Lord, and also workers in iron and bronze to repair the house of the Lord. 13 So those who were engaged in the work labored, and the repairing went forward in their hands, and they restored the house of God to its proper condition and strengthened it.”**

A representative of the king and a representative of the priests are watching over this collection. The collection goes directly to pay the workmen who are renovating the temple.

Verse 14: **“And when they had finished, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, and with it were made utensils for the house of the Lord, both for the service and for the burnt offerings, and dishes for incense and vessels of gold and silver. And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the Lord regularly all the days of Jehoiada.”** After the workmen were paid for the needed renovations, additional money was used to supply the necessary implements for use in the temple. Athaliah had probably stolen the valuable implements which had previously been used.

Thus the overall Joash administration appears to have established a good foundation. The young king has given proper attention to worship of Israel's God. He seems to be headed in the right direction.

III.

But then the train goes off of the rails. In vv. 15-27 of #24 we find that THE JOASH ADMINISTRATION COLLAPSES. (III. THE JOASH ADMINISTRATION COLLAPSES.) Like the Champlain Towers in Surfside, Florida, everything looks good on the outside, but we quickly discover that there are serious problems with the foundation.

A.

In vv. 15 & 16 we encounter PROBLEM ONE: The king is TOO DEPENDENT ON ONE PERSON. (III. THE JOASH... A. PROBLEM ONE: TOO...) Look at vv. 15 & 16: **“But Jehoiada grew old and full of days, and died. He was 130 years old at his death. 16 And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, and toward God and his house.”** The problem is not revealed yet, but it soon will be.

Jehoida is very old when he dies. He is older than Moses was when he died. Long life is a sign in the Old Testament of God’s blessing upon individuals. Jehoida is given the honor of being buried among the kings, because he had functioned mostly as a king in the early years of King Joash. But his interest was not in establishing a dynasty for himself. He seemed to genuinely be interested in reestablishing the descendants of David on the throne of Judah.

We will shortly see that Joash does not do well after Jehoida passes from the scene. It becomes evident that Joash’s spiritual foundation was too dependent upon one person. We see this problem with one person foundations in the world around us--- in businesses, in organizations, in governments, and even in churches. When the founder passes from the scene, the organization sometimes declines.

In 1996 there was a church started in the Seattle area that became known as Mars Hill Church. It grew rapidly and eventually had over 12,000 people in weekly attendance at 15 different locations. Then there were leadership problems that were discovered in the charismatic preaching pastor who did most of the teaching. The church collapsed in just a few weeks.

This dependence upon one person can happen on the individual level. Sometimes the strong spiritual person in a marriage dies, and the surviving spouse flounders. Too often kids leave home and end up spiritually far from the Lord. I went to a public university, and I saw too many college freshmen from some kind of Christian home give in to the temptations of college life. It became clear that their spiritual foundations were weak. They were too dependent upon the spiritual life of their parents. Such is the kind of problem which we discover with Joash.

B.

In vv. 17 & 18 we encounter PROBLEM TWO: Joash LISTENS TO WRONG PEOPLE. (III. A. B. LISTENS TO WRONG PEOPLE) Verses 17 & 18 tell us: **“Now after the death of Jehoiada the princes of Judah came and paid homage to the king. Then the king listened to them. 18 And they abandoned the house of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs.”**

It sounds like these are political officials, rather than priests and Levites, who gain King Joash’s ear. It was the priestly advisors who had established Joash on a sound

foundation. These new advisors are not just secularists, they are promoters of Canaanite gods. Perhaps they are holdovers from the Athaliah administration.

We might wonder how in the world he ended up listening to their advice. Part of the reason implied was that they were flatterers. They came to the king, bowed down to him, and paid him homage. Somehow they ended up convincing Joash to abandon the house of the Lord where Joash had been kept safe as a child. What a terrible decision.

Such it always is that we who are Christians must be careful about who are our influencers. The people whom we let influence our thinking can draw us away from the true God. Such is the danger we face with our kids and grandkids. It is a tough world out there. In this past pandemic year parents in many parts of the country have been unhappy to learn about some of the things which public school teachers have been teaching. We always need to tune in to what our kids are being taught.

C.

We come then to PROBLEM THREE, which is perhaps the most threatening and corrosive for King Joash's foundation. We find in vv. 19-22 that Joash RESISTS GOD'S WORD. (III. A. B. C. PROBLEM THREE: RESISTS GOD'S WORD) According to v. 19, **"Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the Lord. These testified against them, but they would not pay attention."** The plural pronoun implies that it is more than just Joash who is ignoring the prophets. There are other leaders in government who are resisting these messengers from God.

Earlier kings in Judah's history messed up. But most all of them straightened out when they were confronted by true prophets of God. Now Joash and company are directly opposing YHWH. They are turning to false gods. It was Joash's grandmother who supported the Canaanite religion who tried to kill him. You would think that Joash would have learned something from that.

Today it is not so much pagan religions which pose a problem to us. The idols are more subtle. They are things like science which claims to be the final authority on matters of truth. What is called science is, of course, often changing its views. The other idols put in front of us include popularity and money and career success and physical beauty. In Las Vegas it may be the god Fortune.

The extent of the evil response of Joash is highlighted in vv. 20-22: **"Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, 'Thus says God, 'Why do you break the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.'"** 21 **But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord. 22 Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. And when he was dying, he said, 'May the Lord see and avenge!'"**



Stoning was the Old Testament penalty for blasphemy. Here the blasphemers are stoning the representative of God who has just declared God's word. They are doing this stoning in the house of the Lord. The priest Jehoida had earlier insisted that the evil Queen Athaliah not be stoned in the holy temple, but that she be taken outside of the temple precincts to be executed. The temple was also the place where Zechariah's father had preserved the life of King Joash when he was a child. Now this same king commands that Zechariah be killed here. What evil! Ironically the name "Zechariah" means "God remembers." The rest of the chapter shows that God does remember.

D.

Thus in vv. 22-27 we come to **THE END RESULT: THE JOASH ADMINISTRATION COLLAPSES**. (III. A. B. C. D. **THE END RESULT: THE JOASH ADMINISTRATION COLLAPSES**) According to vv. 23 & 24, **"At the end of the year the army of the Syrians came up against Joash. They came to Judah and Jerusalem and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus. 24 Though the army of the Syrians had come with few men, the Lord delivered into their hand a very great army, because Judah had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers. Thus they executed judgment on Joash."** The Hebrew text more literally says "At the turn of the year the army of the Syrians came up..." The reference is probably to the springtime. This is when armies typically went to war.

The result of this battle is that a small Syrian army defeats a larger Judean army. This is because God remembers what Joash and his administration have done. In Leviticus #26 (LEVITICUS 26:14, 17) God warns Moses and his people, **"But if you will not listen to me... I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies."** Such is what happens here.

Verses 25 & 26 of our passage add, **"When they had departed from him [King Joash], leaving him severely wounded, his servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son of Jehoiada the priest, and killed him on his bed. So he died, and they buried him in the city of David, but they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings. 26 Those who conspired against him were Zabad the son of Shimeath the Ammonite, and Jehozabad the son of Shimrith the Moabite."** (PROJECTOR OFF)

I wonder if these two guys were among the officials mentioned in vv. 17 & 18 who encouraged King Joash to abandon the house of the Lord and to serve the Canaanite gods. Now they did Joash in. Part of the problem, perhaps, is that they were foreigners, Gentiles, who brought in foreign religious traditions. In the end Joash is not honored with a royal burial. God remembers.

Verse 27: **"Accounts of his sons and of the many oracles against him and of the rebuilding of the house of God are written in the Story of the Book of the Kings. And Amaziah his son reigned in his place."**

Outwardly the royal reign of King Joash looked like it would be successful. Joash began life in difficult circumstances. But he had key support that pointed him in the right direction in life. Yet, in the end, his administration collapsed because it had a faulty foundation.

That is the question to be left with us. How strong is our foundation? Are we too dependent upon one or two other people for our spiritual life? Do we have the wrong influencers in our lives? Do we resist God's Word when we find it inconvenient to what we really want to do?

The antidote to foundational collapse is developing proper habits of the heart. It is to develop spiritual disciplines--- regular devotions, maintaining Christian fellowship, taking advantage of opportunities for Christian service. Maybe that service might include passing out gospel literature in the community next Saturday.